

St. Petersburg State University  
Graduate School of Management

**Induction Programs for Remote Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic:  
The Case Study Research in Russian Subsidiary of Multinational Consulting Firm**

Master Thesis of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year Master Student  
of the program “Master in Management”

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## ЗАЯВЛЕНИЕ О САМОСТОЯТЕЛЬНОМ ХАРАКТЕРЕ ВЫПОЛНЕНИЯ ВЫПУСКНОЙ КВАЛИФИКАЦИОННОЙ РАБОТЫ

Я, Туник Кирилл Дмитриевич, студент второго курса магистратуры направления «Менеджмент», заявляю, что в моей магистерской диссертации на тему « Программы адаптации персонала для удаленных сотрудников в период пандемии COVID-19: исследование «кейс стади» российского филиала транснациональной консалтинговой компании», представленной в службу обеспечения программ магистратуры для последующей передачи в государственную аттестационную комиссию для публичной защиты, не содержится элементов плагиата.

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I, Kirill Tunik, (second) year master student, program «Management», state that my master thesis on the topic « Induction programs for remote workers during the COVID-19 pandemic: the case study research in Russian subsidiary of multinational consulting firm», which is presented to the Master Office to be submitted to the Official Defense Committee for the public defense, does not contain any elements of plagiarism.

All direct borrowings from printed and electronic sources, as well as from master theses, PhD and doctorate theses which were defended earlier, have appropriate references.

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07.07.2021 (Date)

## ABSTRACT

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Master Thesis Title	Induction Programs for Remote Workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic: The Case Study Research in Russian Subsidiary of Multinational Consulting Firm
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Description of the goal, tasks and main results	The main purpose of this Master Thesis is to explore the topic of induction programs for remote workers and the effect the COVID-19 pandemic had on such programs. Based on the current review of the academic literature on this topic, a necessary research gap has been identified. The empirical part of the study was based on the case study research in Russian Subsidiary of Multinational Consulting Firm and was conducted through five in-depth semi-structured interviews with company employees, who went through the induction program during the COVID-19 pandemic. The main results of the study show the specifics brought by the pandemic to the induction program and explore what newcomers feel going through the program, respectively.
Keywords	Induction programs, remote work, remote workers. telework, teleworkers, induction programs for remote workers.

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# Introduction

Human Resource Management has long established itself as an essential component of a successful business. Companies around the world spend time and money to bring to life the ideas and strategies that scientists discover, rediscover and develop day after day. But with the advent of new technologies and new ways of doing business, there are previously unseen problems and obstacles that companies have to face. Those who find a way to bypass such obstacles first gain a huge advantage over competitors, because innovation in the broadest sense is the key to prosperity and rapid development. But sometimes circumstances appear on the horizon that cannot be influenced by academics, managers, or business owners. All that remains for them is to take the current reality for granted and to look for opportunities for early adaptation with all their might. One of these circumstances in early 2020 became COVID-19, which plunged the whole world into a global pandemic and brought uncertainty, fear and new conditions of existence.

The virus, which originated in a little-known region of China, seemed to put the whole world on pause, while changing the rules of the game. Thus, entire sectors of the economy were forced to slow down, if not stop, while the best minds of the planet were looking for suitable measures to stop the spread of the deadly virus and at the same time try to maintain the delicate balance of the world economy in which the world was before. One such global measure has been working from home, also known as telecommuting or telecommuting.

The concept of remote work has been hovering in scientific and business circles for a long time, but it continued to be regarded as an additional, alternative form of work. Many entrepreneurs and freelancers appeared in the world who provided themselves and their loved ones with exclusively remote work, but such a quick and widespread introduction of telework among global corporations was more like the beginning of a science fiction film. But as will be further demonstrated in this study, no one was ready for such a plot development. And as soon as the virus gained strength, states and organizations had no choice but to learn and adapt on the fly.

But a human being differs from most living things on Earth precisely in that it knows how to adapt. Therefore, the machine of the world economy started working again relatively quickly, albeit not with the same force as back in January 2020. And as the business began to function again, the process of recruiting new employees, their adaptation and introduction to the company continued. And apart from the direct activities of companies, it was the onboarding and induction processes that underwent the most striking changes, because all the strategies that companies used have become sharply outdated due to one simple factor - most employees were transferred to remote work in order to minimize contacts with other people and containing the spread of the COVID-19 virus, respectively.

It is for the reasons described above that it is especially interesting to understand what consequences the global pandemic and remote work, as a consequence, have brought to induction programs, as well as to understand how ordinary employees feel and what they go through, because not only companies have to adapt, but also those who have to get acquainted with a new organization, a new team and new responsibilities in completely new conditions for them, spurring the already high level of stress in which humanity has been living for the last year and a half.

Due to the novelty of this problem, the researchers did not have time to disassemble all aspects of this phenomenon, which gives rise to the following research questions and to find answers to them:

Q1: What have changed about the induction program of the company during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Q2: What newcomers feel about the company's induction program during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The results of this study will be a deeper understanding of the problem, as well as an analysis of the measures taken by the regional office of one of the largest international consulting firms. Such results will help define the field for future academic research and guide practice towards optimizing and increasing the effectiveness of the measures taken.

# Chapter 1

## 1.1. Induction programs

The experience of large companies shows that in today's economy employees are both the most important and an extremely volatile resource of an organization. Even companies with a good corporate culture, decent remuneration and a great climate within the team regularly face the problem of losing employees. This life cycle is immutable and requires constant attention. But if the issue of hiring, retaining an employee and stimulating his interest in his work and the company, respectively, has long been the subject of research for a whole spectrum of sciences: from economics and management to psychology, sociology and statistics, the discussion around determining the correct way of adapting a new employee to a new workplace has been fully conducted not so long ago, even though a number of companies considered the process as an essential one. Needless to say, that the entire process of employee adaptation requires no less attention than the search for and attraction of young talent and has to be updated in accordance with the specifics of the current reality.

With the advent and development of globalization, the widespread and worldwide penetration of the Internet and technologies, in general, changes come not only in the functions of employees, but also in what factors they take into account when choosing a potential employer. And one of the most important factors became the process of including a new employee in the team and his subsequent adaptation within the company. Social networks and the Internet, in general, allow everybody interested to look into the processes that were previously hidden under the veil of secrecy, and not because of the malicious intent of companies and corporations, but because of limited access to confidential information and internal processes, which applicants enjoy using as well as academics and researchers.

At the same time, companies and organizations dating back tens and hundreds of years in their history, such as the University of Bologna (1088) or Siemens (1847), have built and continue to build the processes of interaction and training of new employees for many years, seeing in this the secret not only to stimulate innovation, but also to preserve all the accumulated experience and knowledge, which are the foundations for development. Given the value of such experience and knowledge, the induction process can be perceived as core mechanisms of the way in which firms introduce newcomers into the organization and thus, make the continuous recreation of the organization and of its memory system possible (Birnholtz et al., 2007). Therefore, companies that have realized this value are spending a lot of time and energy building a big and detailed programs to allow "the transformation from an outsider to participating as an effective insider" (Feldman,



1976). According to van Maanen and Schein (1979, p. 211), “new members must be taught to see the organizational world as do their more experienced colleagues if the traditions of the organizations are to survive.” By retaining and communicating the core values of the company, they educate newcomers in a way that allows them to adapt to an ever-changing world and, as a result, survive as competitive players. So that is why the induction programs have an enormous effect on company’s business. It is through induction programs a newcomer is introduced to his work unit and is taught how the working tasks and functions have to be fulfilled (Cooper-Thomas and Anderson, 2006). An additional advantage is the fact that employees, leaving the office doors and returning to their lives outside of work, represent the company and by their behavior support its reputation and its brand. And from this it is especially interesting to analyze and understand the processes of adaptation, socialization and inclusion of newcomers that are used by such companies and market leaders in order to try to learn from their experience the best solutions and practices.

First of all, it must be remembered that any team is, first of all, a social group, with its own internal cross-relationships, sometimes subgroups and both interpersonal and team-wide relationships. And any replacement of an employee or simply an expansion of the team affects such relationships and the social structure of a team. And if the matter of socialization was clear and undoubtable for almost all the companies, Feldman (1988) was among the first to draw attention to the need to link organizational socialization programs and policies more closely to other HRM practices. Later, in 1991, Feldman and Baker came up with a framework to link socialization tactics proposed by van Maanen and Schein (1979) and HRM methods and practices, and that framework had to bring to a company using it three benefits, three corporate strategic goals:

- Innovation
- Quality Enhancement
- Cost Reduction

These strategic goals of the induction program stayed pretty much the same for all the companies for last 40 years because they are matching with core principles of doing business which were proving themselves right throughout the human history. But it would be unfair to say that an organization is the only one getting benefits from the structured induction programs. The induction process is an auxiliary tool for both sides of the interaction. On the one hand, the organization takes advantage of the opportunity to integrate a new employee into the team with minimal time or material losses, and to effectively use his knowledge and capabilities. On the other hand, employees feel the need to reduce complexity when they enter into a new organization in order to

be able to contribute to organizational activities (Bauer et al., 1998). And to do so a newcomer has to go through organizational socialization, meaning that he has to become familiar not only with his colleagues, but with the company, in general.

Staff induction and orientation practices govern unconsciously or deliberately organizational socialization (Antonacopoulou and Guttel, 2010), which itself is built around the assimilation of organizational values, norms, and behavior patterns of a company that are necessary for any new member to learn (Schein, 1988). In essence, organizational socialization, as a part of the induction process, includes the entire process of actions taken by the organization and action taken by the newcomer to ensure effective adjustment (Tuttle, 2002). Any established social order is also a disorder at the same time, given the impossibility of "freezing" the development of relations in a team due to the sociality of such an order (Holland and Lave, 2001). But the change in the internal climate of the team can also become a starting point for the development of the team and the company. The arrival of newcomers could bring with it a phenomenon of diversity that has been studied so deeply by academics in recent decades. And this diversity can initiate not only a modification of the established ways of doing work, established methods of solving typical problems, but also the birth of innovations, the emergence of completely new methods. And just as the increased presence of millennials as employees of global corporations has brought a deeper understanding of this generation, new channels of interaction with them and ways to reach new customers, diversity, in general, has a chance to positively influence the team's ability to solve problems by combining sometimes radically different approaches to the problem.

But innovation and development are a matter of the future, and even then, no one can guarantee that the expected result will meet such expectations. The only thing the company can count on is that its induction and orientation policies will facilitate this development. Therefore, the primary tasks of the induction programs still remain the same: to familiarize the newcomer with colleagues, the structure of the company, its' goals and to transfer the values of the organization. Many academics believe that activities of organized induction must have a ritual character to strengthen the feeling of belonging to that company and should focus on developing attitudes and values that are of interest to the company (Rodica Dragomiroiu et al., 2014).

Another big thing that most of the companies have in common in terms of the induction programs is a chance to cooperate with colleagues from the day one. Of course, companies usually have manuals, printed instructions, describing the technical and software part of the job, but often these handouts are out timed or just do not fully disclose all the small details a task can bring. Partly, it can be explained by the fact that these manuals are being made or updated by interns or

fulltime IT-specialists, and if in the first case interns usually base their conclusion about what is important and what is not on the interviews they conduct with fulltime employees, the IT-specialists view the task in a whole different way compared, for example, to a linear manager or a lawyer, because they understand such things on a much deeper level and even if not, they feel more confident when an IT-problem appears. So, it is much easier for a newcomer to address a question to a colleague sitting next desk to him. This example can be extrapolated on much more complicated and specific situations, because, if we are speaking about a job or a function in a company rather than a vacuum cleaner, a manual becomes out-of-date the second it is printed. That is why it is worthy to make newcomers exposed to someone who has done, or is doing, their new job. They have clearer guidelines for the job and less need to learn on their own than newcomers who have no such exposure (Allen and Meyer, 1990, p. 848). It does not mean that such manuals or instructions should not be made, it just means that it has to be more generalized and to teach whom to ask, what department to visit and how to react in an appropriate way, and having a mentorship program or a buddy program definitely helps.

Despite the fact that core idea behind most of the induction programs remains the same as well as the main ideas, there is a room for individualization since every company has its' unique approach, unique values and some specifics that are caused by the variety of industries and regions. So, the organization's concrete induction practices that are derived from abstract socialization tactics have to be consistent with the overall HRM strategy (Baron and Kreps, 1999). For example, there is the objectives of the guidance issued by Human Resources Tennessee Gas Company in Houston, United States:

- Creating a sense of belonging among employees;
- Providing information of the company and its business policy;
- Organizing discussions for new employees; they can ask questions and receive answers from management;
- Organizing meetings with employees;
- Explaining the benefits that exist in the company;
- Caring for all routine activities related to receiving;

From the list above it can be seen that the main in common among the objectives is communication in any form. And it is communication that allows to speak with new employees in detail what functions will now become their daily responsibilities, how it should be done, what company values are laying at the heart of this approach, and why exactly the company chose this approach, why these values are the anchor of all organization's activities. Such socialization is

central to the reproduction of an organization because it enables new individuals to become functional members of a collectivity (Anderson-Gough et al., 2000). The successful socialization and integration can be detected through its' indicators, such as organizational attachment and commitment, job satisfaction, social integration, role clarity, task mastery, values congruence, and (perceived) fit (Bauer and Green, 1994; Brett et al., 1990; Cable and Parsons, 2001; Morrison, 1993a, b; Wanberg and Kammeyer-Mueller, 2000). And it is not only about mutual respect within teams, but also about the rules of interaction with clients, transferring the company's experience and preventing newcomers from making mistakes of their predecessors, avoiding pitfalls and choosing the right direction, the right path from the very first day. But, as mentioned earlier, the process of admitting a newcomer is a two-way process, and both parties can and should be its beneficiaries, and a thoughtful and well-developed induction process is the key to such benefits.

In 2007, Rohde and Sprogø developed a theory which suggested to view the induction process as a generative dance, where an organization and a newcomer are seen as dancing partners. According to this theory, later developed with the participation of Bente Elkjaer, as well as in dancing, there are two main parts of which the induction process consists: organizational renewal and the maintenance of status quo. The organizational renewal means that every new employee allows a company to diversify itself letting his personal thoughts, experiences and points of view to renew company's way of doing business in a broad sense. In this part the theory has the same core idea behind it with all the theories connecting diversity and organization's development, its process of innovation. On the other hand, it means that everything an employee brings to a company has its effect, big or small, on almost everything about this company, because the organization has to adapt even to the pace and dynamism a newcomer has.

But as well as with dancing, with induction process a company has to maintain the status quo, meaning that an organization cannot let a newcomer destroy everything they were building in terms of organizational structure, work rhythm and hierarchy. It is for a reason, as already mentioned, that companies with a rich history so carefully protect their built-up internal processes, which act as a guarantee of stability and predictability of the result. Such predictability is an undeniable competitive advantage of companies for both their potential customers and potential employees, and its total and thoughtless destruction threatens with irreparable consequences for everyone involved.

Rohde and Sprogø propose to consider the process of induction precisely as a synthesis of organizational renewal and the maintenance of status quo, because, as in dance, each of them plays its own role in the work of the company. Maintaining the status quo, protection of the

established foundations and working mechanisms allow an organization to easily integrate new employees, entire new departments and new business processes into the original structure of the company. But in the absence of the renewal and renovation, development seems difficult, if not impossible, because innovation, as a phenomenon, involves the abandonment of the old in favor of the new. As in dance, in the process of induction, both parties - the company and beginners - must follow a set of general rules, rhythm, use the necessary steps, twists and turns. But whether in dance, or in the process of adaptation of a beginner in a team, repetition of the same movements and actions will lead to the same result. Therefore, renewal is so necessary, since it is crucial to give the opportunity for new ideas, characters and tools to modify the old order, because that is where the potential for growth lies. To reveal their thoughts, Rohde and Sprogøe also draw an additional analogy between the process of induction and making music, bearing in mind that the birth of new melodies or whole genres presupposes the presence of courage to improvise and deviate from traditional musical combinations. According to the theory the goal of the whole induction and orientation processes has to be to combine a pull towards stability and an intention to innovate and adapt as two sides of the same coin.

It is no secret that the key to a successful induction process lies in communication, and many researchers suggest that both verbal communication plays an important role, in the process of which the beginner receives valuable advice and guidance, and non-verbal communication, which is responsible for conveying general mood, quality of communication between colleagues and the level of staff involvement. Some academics even single out stylistic communication separately, bearing in mind that even the office building, its structure and design, colors and decor elements have an impact. Anyway, at the beginning of 2020, the usual rhythm of human life changed with the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has left its imprint on the process of targeting newcomers, because almost all companies have switched to remote work, and for a little over a year now, most companies have been forced to integrate new employees online. This approach has both its supporters and opponents, because online has complicated the most important component of the induction process - communication.

But before talking about the COVID-19 pandemic, its impact on the work of companies and interaction with new employees, as well as telework, as a consequence of the pandemic, it is needed to dive deeper in the concept of telework, describe who teleworkers are, and what are their distinctive features. In other words, how does telework differ from working from the office, and how does it threaten or benefit the usual way of doing business.

## 1.2. Teleworkers

Throughout human history, the productivity of an employee, or simply the performance of his professional duties, has always been directly associated with his direct presence in the workplace. At first, these were farms and shops, workshops and communes, then with the expansion of globalization, the increase in the number and size of countries and states, the establishment of cross-border trade routes, covering entire parts of the civilized world, jobs began to expand, gradually turning into large factories and, in the future, into the huge office and industrial buildings that we are used to today. In the current reality, getting to work 40 minutes or more and the same amount from work to home has already become a routine for an employee and even a part of the daily routine. And with the growth of the world's population, the size of cities and the number of personal automobiles, this number will only grow, causing even greater traffic congestion, which will only increase the time employees have to spend away from both their work and away from their family and friends. and their personal life. But technology is providing people around the world with more and more opportunities, in particular for work.

Terms like telework, telecommuting or virtual office first were brought up in articles of Martino (1979) and Giuliano (1981). But back in the 1970s, a term similar to remote work appeared in the context of "work from home", which meant an alternative not to work directly from the office, but to physical travel around the country and the world, respectively (Nilles et al., 1976). Telecommuting or telework (Watad and DiSanzo, 2000; Nilles, 1992; Olson, 1983), narrowly defined, encompasses those opportunities that workers are given to work from home rather than reporting to a centralized office location, and was seen as the “next working environment revolution” (Kelly, 1985) to change the way most companies saw the organization of working space and its importance. Another definition of telework was given by Moon and Stanworth (1997) who saw it as “a form of “flexible” work which involves distance work, remote work or telecommuting which is dependent upon the use of information and communication technologies” (pp. 338–339). Later the perception of Moon and Stanworth was categorized by Andriessen (1991), Gray et al. (1993), and Huws (1994):

1) *Home-based telework*: high-skilled or low-skilled work obligations are completed at home through virtual means. This may include various forms of communication such as computers, telephones and other digital devices.

2) *Teleworking from remote offices*: work is done at workplaces that are far from the primary office such as at “satellite workplaces” (which is controlled by the owner); at telecentres (information technology and work space is accommodated for a given group, and managers are

approached to rent space for their workers) or at telecottages (where training is accommodated for clients, and attempts are made to attract recruitment for independently employed telecommuters).

3) *Mobile telework*: completed by individuals who now and again work away from their ordinary working base (either a customary office, a satellite office or at home) and whose work usually includes travel as well as investing time in clients' premises.

As it can be seen from the categorization, types of telework widely differs one from the other, even though the main concept of employee absence from the office remains the core idea behind it, so it is better to see telework as a multidimensional phenomenon wherein its character varies along utilization, knowledge intensity, intraorganizational contact, extraorganizational contact and location (Olsen, 1989; Gray et al., 1993; Gillespie et al., 1995).

One of the earliest incentives for remote working was the 1990 mandate from the United States Congress, the Amendment to the Clean Air Act. According to this mandate, companies operating in one of the 11 states with the worst air quality in the country and employing more than 100 people were required to reduce their office staff by 20 percent, including through the widespread introduction of remote work. The results of such an experiment were generally successful, but due to the wide range of instruments it is difficult to determine which one was the most effective. But the indisputable fact remains that this mandate has positively influenced the perception of employers and employees of a new way of doing business.

These days, together with the development of the Internet and the wide access to modern computer technologies, telework is the easiest it has ever been. Since 2005, the number of telecommuters has grown by 140 percent, nearly 10 times faster than the rest of the workforce. The statistics provided by GlobalWorkplaceAnalytics.com (2018) shows 4.3 million employees (3.2 percent of the workforce) work at least half their hours from home (Wang et al., 2019). It is expected that about 70 percent of workers will work remotely at least five days a month by 2025 (Molla, 2019), and most of the hiring managers that took part in a survey conducted by Upwork in 2019 believed that in the next decade up to 38 percent of future full-time newcomers would be hired to work remotely at least part of the time. And even today the statistics shows that around 4.3 million employees (3.2 percent of the workforce) are involved in teleworking (GlobalWorkplaceAnalytics.com, 2018). Big companies and international organizations are trying to incorporate telecommuting strategies in its' everyday life for three main reasons: as a part of cutting costs strategies since it lets to minimize, for example, office expenses, etc.; to motivate employees and give them a sense of control; and to allow employees to work from home and at a convenient time and to help them with creation of work-life balance, which is especially important

for those who have children or relatives who require constant care (Madsen, 2003). These reasons were almost always the core idea behind the choice of telework, even though there are plenty more arguments for it and many additional benefits. But latest researches showed that main benefits of telework for organizations (Perez-Perez et al., 2003) are:

1) *Reduced costs:*

According to research of Radcliffe (2010), companies and organizations are able to cut their expenses using the teleworking strategy, but talking about cost reduction, people most often give an example of saving money a company would spend on office space, without going into details. But there are many layers underneath this statement: infrastructure expenses, water and electricity bills, phone and Internet bills, travelling expenses, compensation for sick leave and leave to care for children or sick relatives, cleaning and security staff salaries, etc. There is also evidence that companies are able to save on salary costs because employees do not need to spend extra time beyond work hours, for example traveling to and from the office, so a company has a legit argument for not compensating such time and paying only for the job done (De Graaf and Rietveld, 2007).

2) *Planning skills encouragement:*

The autonomy that remote workers receive in prioritizing tasks encourages them to develop time planning skills, as evidenced by numerous studies, including Morgan's work published in 2004. In turn, this autonomy significantly increases employee satisfaction (Gurstein, 2001; Harpaz, 2002) and leads to a significant increase in their productivity (Morgan, 2004; Fonner and Roloff, 2010).

3) *Reduced employee's turnover:*

Researchers and employers both noticed that if an employee feels his independence and autonomy, has the freedom to allocate his time during the day and the skills to effectively use such freedom, and also feels an increase in his productivity, feels the significance of his work for the company or a client, the result will be shown in decrease in the turnover and in sick days reduction.

But not only the companies and organizations are putting their effort to make remote work a part of their life and routine. Employees can see the benefits from telework as well as their employers. There are many studies, whose focus is primarily on the impact of teleworking on employees, on identifying the pros and cons, advantages and disadvantages of telecommuting for personnel. And among all the advantages that were identified in the process of research, those that are repeated in one form or another from author to author:



1) *Flexibility:*

This advantage is the other side of the coin of the autonomy that the employer is willing to provide to the teleworker. In general, this is about the ability to determine your own work schedule, provided that all the tasks set by the management are completed. And the reason for moving from standard working hours to those that are convenient for a particular employee can be as an individual schedule due to the presence of a family, children, pets or hobbies, as well as climate or individual peak productivity hours during the day. Telework allows employees to independently find a balance between the requirements of the task and their own comfort, allowing them to build a pattern that is convenient for them specifically, since teleworkers have more prominent power over their work conditions (Tremblay and Genin, 2007). And as long as an employee has a convenient and comfortable workplace, telework can reduce the number of interruptions in the work process during the day.

2) *Increased family time:*

Most often, remote work is done from home, therefore, it provides an opportunity to combine the work itself and to maintain high-quality family relations, to manage family-related issues (Johnson et al., 2007), as well as taking care of the children and other family members. Many academics claim that such an opportunity acting as significant resource for the employees and can even lead to positive changes in productivity.

3) *Possibility to work from home during the sickness:*

A possibility to work from home can be a good and healthy alternative to office presenteeism (Johns, 2010), which often does not lead to any good repercussions and may even give a start to the spread of the virus to all employees and an overall decrease in productivity and organizational losses. The easiest and the most common analogy is chickenpox booms in elementary schools which always starts with one sick kid and ends with overall cancel of classes.

4) *Save on travel expenses:*

Both travel by public transport and travel by private cars have at least one thing in common - their price is growing every year. For example, teleworking allows employees to significantly reduce their travel costs (Tremblay and Genin, 2007). Not to mention that the "price" of the time that could be spent with family, friends or just for a favorite hobby is difficult to express in monetary terms and is definitely of high value. All of this could potentially lead to the increase in employee satisfaction and to the increase in their productivity respectively.

5) *Opportunity to work on parental leave:*

Today's reality is that the transition from the traditional distribution of roles between parents in the process of raising a child to something new is only accelerating. That is why it is incorrect to say that only women or only mothers are the beneficiaries of the opportunity to

combine telework with childcare. More and more fathers were choosing to stay home with a child for the last couple of decades. And telework giving a chance to both parents to simultaneously taking care of their kids and taking care of their careers. Most of the papers issued on that topic cover such advantages of telework, like being able to invest more time and more energy in the relationships with their kids, for women (Hartig et al., 2007), but it is absolutely reasonable to extrapolate the logic on the men also. So, in this part telework also helps to stimulate an elimination of current segregation roles between genders (Diab-Bahman и Al-Enzi, 2020) and to let every family and every partnership to make this choice for themselves.

But telework, just like any phenomenon, has its disadvantages, because, firstly, the very concept of telework, even according to the most daring estimates, is no more than 60 years old, since only in 1960-1970 it became possible to expand the concept of remote work from "work at home ", which simply implies the performance of those tasks that could be performed in isolation from technology, information, databases and colleagues, access to which was provided by the office, and" mobile work ", when the work itself was essentially just a constant move, e.g. the traveling salesman.

There is relatively little research that brings together all the disadvantages of telecommuting, as most of them are based on research either of the experience of a specific company or of the specifics of a particular industry, which allows sufficient conclusions to be drawn, but does not allow to generalize the obstacles to effective teleworking together. because specialists from different fields perceive the difficulties that arise during the initial adaptation to work outside the office in different ways. But it can be stated that following issues are the universal disadvantages of telework:

1) *Work-family tension/conflict:*

Studies showed that even though teleworkers mainly work from home and have a chance to spend more time with their families, most of them are struggling with building a balance between work and family time. Around 70 percent of teleworkers are facing an increased stress from having to deal with family related issues during working hours (McCormick, 1992). Another problem teleworkers face is the lack of truly work space and being interrupted by family members that may come to the room any minute they want since most of teleworkers all around the world do not have a separated room which may be used as a home office. In other words home-based teleworking "may induce a 'time elasticity illusion' in other household members, who may believe that time spent at home can be used for household production without detracting from time spent in paid work" (Cameron and Fox, 2011, p. 134). And the home office example is only the head of the iceberg highlighting that teleworker's work-life balance is highly dependent on the individual

socio-economic conditions (Aguilera et al., 2016). Working from home may cause an overlapping between work-related commitments and everyday personal affairs (Allen et al., 2012).

2) *Reduction in visibility:*

Most employees around the world live with the vision that in order to stand out among colleagues, it is necessary not only to conscientiously perform their duties and take a responsible approach to solving entrusted tasks, but also to establish interpersonal relationships within the team and with the management, respectively. And there is a large grain of truth in this, since a person, being a social being, cannot get rid of a personal relationship with someone, as a factor influencing the perception of the results of his or her work. And if part of the scientific community continues to insist that the assessment of a particular employee should be based solely on the results of his work, most academics and employers agree that there is at least some number of positions and professions where, with all other things being equal, personal qualities and ability to socialize, effectively communicating with others is one of the most important components of success. That is why formal and informal communication skills are especially important for teleworkers and their managers (Cascio, 2000). Teleworkers tend to believe that because of the distance between them and their colleagues they are less respected in their organizations and possess fewer career advantages than their collocated peers (Wang et al., 2019).

Thus, teleworking establishes an additional distance both between the employees themselves and between the boss and the subordinate, which can negatively affect the career growth of a teleworker. In addition, this invisibility is also expressed in reduced feedback from managers, which directly affects the employee's assessment of their work and the ability to correct mistakes and develop.

3) *Isolation/lack of communication:*

Speaking about the advantages of telework, it was noticed that some of its components have a positive effect on job satisfaction, but constant or partial telework alienates colleagues from each other, leaving them alone with their tasks in the absence of verbal or non-verbal support and leading to the psychological isolation. Telework does not fulfill a person's need not only for support but also for understanding, social and emotional aspects of human-to-human interaction (Diekema, 1992; Golden et al., 2008, p. 1412). And psychological isolation, as a physical separation from the colleagues, can lead to the job dissatisfaction and higher turnover rates (Gainey et al., 1999; Bartel et al., 2012).

#### 4) *Increased work hours:*

Teleworking obviously allows employees to save their time and effectively manage it. But, as mentioned earlier, it requires not only the development of a certain set of skills, such as time management and the ability to distinguish life and work, but also certain conditions, such as, for example, a separate room that can be set aside for a home office. And since not all teleworkers have the opportunity to build their work process in the most optimal way, there is an inevitable overlap of work on personal life which stimulates stress and time allocation challenges (Wheatley, 2012). Such an overlapping jeopardizes the flexibility advantage brought by telework (Vesala and Tuomivaara, 2015) and bringing in a greater work-related fatigue (Kim et al., 2015). In addition, insecurity and pressure caused by the employee's "invisibility" for his superiors, his manager, sows doubt and negatively affects the perception of the work results in his or her eyes. Together, these factors force the teleworker to strive to do more, sometimes even in the absence of real prerequisites, and stimulates work intensification which derives from the willingness of remote workers to exchange increased job flexibility with greater work effort (Kelliher and Anderson, 2010). So, to compensate the invisibility of a teleworker to his colleagues and supervisors, they are ready to make themselves available around-the-clock by simply not switching off a computer or a mobile device after the working hours (Hamilton, 2002; Leonari et al., 2010), which undermines an already shaky work-life balance.

#### 5) *Work-life balance issues:*

All the disadvantages of teleworking described above have one thing in common - they all affect the quality of life of the teleworker and wreak havoc on the work-life balance. In general, the work-life balance itself can be characterized as a healthy and conscious delimitation of the problems and tasks facing a person at work and in life outside of work, which makes it possible to fix the quality of life that is comfortable for a particular person or even improve it. Such a deliberate simplification allows us to clearly see that everything: from forced overtime to conflicts with the family and a lack of daily socialization, affects the psychological background of a person, his self-esteem, mood and attitude towards life, in general. The lack of a clear distinction between work and personal life stimulates the penetration of work beyond working hours, which, together with the intensification of efforts, pushes an invasion of job-related worries in everyday life (Felstead and Henseke, 2017).

Reviewing the literature, it is evident that telework has its' advantages as well as disadvantages, and, in most cases, they have roots in the same core principles and main ideas behind the telework concepts. To implement telework in the most effective way companies and

managers have to keep their attention on three groups of issues that if handled right can minimize the effect of telework disadvantages. These groups of issues are:

1) *Technological issues:*

One of the most important resources for the successful implementing of telework is the technology. Companies must invest in the right equipment and educated professionals who would provide not only the technical support to teleworkers, but also ensure the smooth operation of everything around and behind teleworkers in the central office as well as in the virtual office.

Access to mobile devices, laptops, tablets and the development of high-speed Internet give modern teleworkers opportunities that were not possible for their colleagues even 10-15 years ago. It is interesting to note that, for example, in the articles published in the middle of 2000s, Email and access to the Internet through a telephone cable connected to a PC in the employee's apartment were seen as one the most important tools of a teleworker. Due to advances in technology, today's teleworkers can perform a significant portion of their job duties using instant messengers being connected to the Wi-Fi of a small coffee shop next to their home. But such an advancement is also a potential problem, because all employees must be properly trained to use all the tools and instruments that enable effective teleworking. Therefore, addressing this group of issues, organizations should not only provide employees with computers or tablets, but also take care of creating appropriate manuals, instructions, possibly video lessons or whole online courses, which should be constantly updated and adapted in accordance with the development of technologies, software and the emergence of new solutions on the market.

2) *Workforce issues:*

Workforce is definitely one of the main resources of every and any company, and paying attention to employees, taking care of them have always paid off both in terms of organizational success and in terms of company's revenues and income.

As it has been described earlier telework can benefit employees, their well-being and their work-life and work-family balance as well as be destructive and bring new sources of chaos to teleworkers homes. And the line between success and failure of telecommuting is extremely thin, because without proper training, an employee can make many mistakes that for sure will have an impact on his productivity and overall job satisfaction. Therefore, first of all, the employer must teach the employee how to correctly carry out telework and accompany him on the way to adaptation. Such auxiliary steps can be courses on time management, organizing space, prepared

guides for interacting with family members during the working day, or just a list of actions that will help you switch from work mode back to everyday life with its worries and joys.

### 3) *Organizational issues:*

The transition to telecommuting has always been and will be a daunting task for the company as well. First, by releasing an employee from the office, the organization significantly weakens control over him, therefore, must be patient and trust the teleworker. Second, by introducing telecommuting, the company spreads out its departments, and must facilitate communication between colleagues to ensure effective communication. Third, the company must address all those experiences that attend teleworkers, such as the fear of isolation and falling out of the manager's field of vision and, as a result, deterioration of career prospects. Not to mention the need for additional investments in adequate equipment and training for employees, which at first may even exceed the savings that reduced office space provides.

Each transition to telecommuting is unique and requires an individual approach, but if the company pays attention to these three groups of issues, transformation can be an interesting process and a reason for further development.

But today, as never before, companies have received not only the incentive, but also the obligation to widely implement telework, and the reason was the COVID-19 pandemic, which has put the whole world in a situation of ambiguity, uncertainty and fear for the future. So today, almost 18 months after the start of the pandemic, it is especially interesting to understand how COVID-19 has impacted the concept of telecommuting and how it is perceived by both employees and companies around the world.

## **1.3. COVID-19 and telework**

The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on the lives of virtually everyone in the world. The high infectiousness and rapid spread of the virus forced states to reconsider their policies towards their residents, and one of the most important steps for containing the virus was the forced transfer of a significant part of organizations to remote work, to telework. And all the companies had to accept this new reality, come to terms with the inevitability of such a measure and just start acting, start writing and implementing a plan to transfer a significant part of their employees to telework. The pros and cons of telecommuting themselves remained the same, as well as the degree of preparedness of companies for this format of doing business. The main

problem was the fact that neither companies nor employees were ready for such significant changes, and they had to adapt on the fly.

But all of the above is true only for those companies that, in principle, can be transferred to telecommuting. For example, Baker (2020) found that 75% American workers (usually in healthcare, manufacturing, retail and food catering) cannot work at home, while only 25% (usually in technology, computer, management, administration, finance and engineering) can do so. Companies which were not able to switch to telecommuting or failed to adapt to “work from home” arrangement were forced to shut down, layoff or put employees on furlough. Brynjolfsson et al. (2020) estimated that 16m Americans are hence out of work. At the same time, the research on Chinese economy showed that around 38 percent of workforce have been more or less successfully using telecommuting strategies (Zhang et al., 2020).

Dingel and Neiman (2020) found a positive correlation between a country’s income level and the number of jobs that can be completed at home. While Mexico and Turkey have less than 25% teleworking able job share, Sweden and the UK have more than 40%. In short, the wealthier a country, the more likely telework as an overall policy can take place in it.

At the beginning of the pandemic most organizations had real struggle with transforming almost everything about their way of doing business. The main reason for that was the fact they did not have a formal telecommuting policy and were unprepared for an overall and immediate shift to remote working. Since before the pandemic, almost no company had a full telework transformation as its’ first priority, managers clearly lacked policies, resources and experience to deal with the situation. And it is not a surprise that companies met problems along the way, because, according to Mahler (2012), telecommuting is not just a new way of working during such situations but a new organizational form where tasks are not the same anymore, integration problems are highly complex, and management responsibilities are defined differently.

One of the tasks that has to be differently in telework rather than in the usual circumstances is the induction program. Earlier, it has been described how and why induction programs are so crucial for the future success of a newcomer and for a company respectively, and the pandemic has not changed this conclusion at all. COVID-19 changed the way we see the future of work, so companies have to change the way they introduce themselves to newcomers and the way both sides get to know each other.

#### **1.4. Induction programs during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

We must admit that today the whole world lives in strange times, and the daily readiness for change has not been so acute for a long time: new government policies, restrictions and bans, widespread telecommuting and online learning, closing businesses and bankruptcies of organizations, forced layoffs and, unfortunately, fatal losses among employees - all this has become our reality, and it remains only not to lose heart and constantly adapt. And even in such difficult and unpredictable times, the global economy does not fully stop, which means that employees continue to change companies and move to new positions, and each of them needs support from colleagues and leadership from the organization

To date, there are very few comprehensive and detailed studies on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on recruitment programs and on induction programs in particular. This can be explained both by the fact that the current reality has existed for a little more than a year, and by the fact that companies are still learning and moving in small steps towards developing full-fledged practices. So, the most useful source of information on a given topic is online induction guides, since this experience has been accumulated over the years of practice and is the closest to the current situation. It is necessary to keep in mind that the main difference is the fact that in most cases online induction included offline events as well, such as a meeting colleagues and managers in person, a tour around the office or other welcome events.

But the topic of online induction or orientation processes was not popular among the scholars as well, since it has always been seen as a secondary tool, “just in case” tool, and there are arguments for that position. Firstly, big companies always preferred offline induction as a more effective one given a chance to build communication between colleagues in person. Secondly, online onboarding and orientation was used as a main tool either by small and young organizations whose experience can hardly be extrapolated on the general sample, or by companies whose employees do not need to build strong relationships with each other due to the specifics of their work: a group of specialists cooped together for delivering one particular project or its' particular part, working more like a freelancers united by the same goal but responsible for an individual part of the work. And thirdly, a significant amount of data for such a research is difficult to collect because its potential sources – companies, are not consistent with the online induction strategies themselves and mostly just adapt to the reality in the particular moment.

But that is why the research provided in this paper is important – it does not answer all the questions that arose during the pandemic, but tries to identify a research gap, draw attention to the



issue and make the first conclusions based on the experience of a large company with a long history.

## **1.5. Research Goals and Research Questions**

The COVID-19 pandemic has put the entire world in a constant need to change and adapt, and newcomers, who even under normal circumstances experience significant stress joining a new team, need support and clear strategies and practices from organizations more than ever. But to provide such strategies and practices organizations must have a clear understanding of their actions and its consequences. In the case of induction programs during the COVID-19 pandemic, almost no company has such deep knowledge and experience, and have to learn on the go. The experience of online induction is definitely useful but is not enough, since, as it has been said earlier, they are usually combining online and offline instruments.

Speaking about the researchers, there is an obvious research gap in the area of induction programs during the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the novelty of the problematic and the lack of sufficient data and established practices among the companies themselves. But at the moment it seems difficult, if not impossible, to draw full-fledged conclusions and form full-fledged practices, since this requires that the whole world has come to a point of relative stability, and researchers have the opportunity to fully generalize the experience accumulated by companies.

The goal of this research is to take the first step towards significant conclusions on the topic: based on a case-study of an international company with large resources, a big number of employees and well-established HR practices, try to figure out what changes have been made to the induction process, what problems the employer and newcomers face respectively, as well as how both sides view these changes and what do they feel about it in general. The obvious research gap and the research goal led to the research questions below:

Q1: What have changed about the induction program of the company during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Q2: What newcomers feel about the company's induction program during the COVID-19 pandemic?

## **Chapter 2**

The previous chapter has covered the research gap, introduced the research questions and provided the description of literature background for the chosen topic. And as it follows from the previous research, the induction programs during the COVID-19 pandemic did not have sufficient attention from the scholars. The following chapter describes the methodology, which was used for this research, and the company chosen for a case-study and why.

### **2.1. Case-study justification**

For this research, it was chosen to conduct a case study, since there is a small number of researches and papers on this topic and even on topics similar and related to the research itself. And since the chosen topic requires extensive conceptualization together with theory building, a case study approach seemed to be a good choice, keeping in mind that, according to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016), the case study method is more of a research strategy rather than a method that can present onerous business cases most pragmatically. In other words, case study is a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context using multiple sources of evidence (Robson, 2002). Case study allows researchers to focus on a specific issue in the context of one or several companies, thereby narrowing down the number of factors that could distort the specifics of the research object. Of course, the limited sample creates the possibility of bias and does not allow drawing conclusions that could be safely extrapolated to the general sample or presented as general recommendations. But, as mentioned earlier, the limited nature of the sources and the novelty of the object of research itself forces, first of all, to determine what it is an object of research and what environmental factors affect it or are directly or indirectly dependent on it.

The novelty of the topic determines an exploratory character of the research, considering the fact that the problem is clearly understudied and scholars just did not have a chance to delve into it. An exploratory research is usually defined as a method helping to answer the question: “What is happening?”, and to seek insights (Robson, 2002). And the qualitative approach has been chosen as the most appropriate in new topic areas (Eisenhardt, 1989).

## **2.2. Company of research**

PricewaterhouseCoopers is an international company with offices in 157 countries and more than 276,000 people working in it. The company has three main spheres of activities: assurance, advisory and tax, and legal services.

In 2019 PWC has registered overall revenues in the amount of US\$42.5 billions and it was a 4,3% increase compared to the previous financial year of 2018. Around 75% of total revenues were brought by offices in North and South Americas (further – Americas region) and Western Europe, US\$17.8 billion and US\$14.1 billion respectively. The distribution of the company's revenues by spheres of activities in 2019 was as follows: assurance services revenues were around US\$17.4 billion, advisory services revenues saw a significant increase of 10% compared to the previous year and amounted to US\$14.4 billions and tax and legal services brought US\$10.7 billions of revenues respectively.

Since 2001 PWC is included in the list of “Big 4” – four biggest professional services networks in the world alongside with Deloitte, Ernst & Young and KPMG, and only Deloitte, who, by the way, has significantly more employees, surpassed PWC in terms of revenue amounts in 2019.

Among the “Big 4” list PWC was ranked the second most desirable workplace worldwide for business graduates and the third for IT and engineering students. Also, PWC understands the importance of a broad view of a problem, so, besides some cases which are explained by legal restrictions, the company is opened for graduates of all faculties to have a better perspective in the globalized reality. There is a big number of PWC employees who received have degrees in math, sociology or even biology.

PWC opened its first office in Russia back in 1913 but due to political and financial instability had to shut their offices before reopening it in 1989. After more than three successful decades PWC can be proud of becoming one of the biggest professional services networks in Russia with more than 3,000 employees that are placed in 12 offices in the biggest cities in the country.

Right now, the company has several main spheres of activities in Russia:

- Analysis and control of risks
- Audit services
- Tax and Legal services

- Advisory services
- Strategic consulting services
- Corporate services

PricewaterhouseCoopers seems to be a suitable subject for research for several reasons:

1) Firstly, many years of experience and doing business in different countries presupposes the presence of a high level of organization and sophistication of all processes within the company;

2) Secondly, a large staff and their high qualifications presuppose not only knowledge of team building, interaction with employees, their attraction, retention and development, but also a wealth of experience in the indoctrination of these employees in different countries, different cultures and in different teams;

3) Third, the company's high competitiveness and market leadership testify to the ability to adapt, find solutions to complex problems and use all the tools and knowledge effectively.

Based on the above arguments, the company's response to the COVID-19 restrictions can serve as a role model among colleagues and competitors, which makes its analysis to be treated with increased interest.

### **2.3. Data collection**

The goal of this study is to determine what had to be changed in the induction process in the PWC office in Saint-Petersburg, Russia and what the newcomers and their managers feel about these changes.

The primary data for the research was collected via interviews. Scholars distinguish three types of interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, 2009). Due to the qualitative character of the study, it was decided to not conduct structured interviews, since they are responsible for gaining quantitative results that suit more explanatory or descriptive research (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill, 2009). Unstructured interviews, although giving an opportunity to get deeper level of understanding of the company's activities, does not fit the research goal of the study because presumes that the topic of the interview is deeply understood by interviewees, what in case of such a phenomenon as COVID-19 pandemic is hard to reach due to its novelty. In accordance with the presented reasoning, semi-structured interviews were chosen as an instrument for collecting qualitative data.

To reach the research goal and to answer the research questions stated in the previous chapter six semi-structured interviews were conducted with the company representatives. In order to get a deeper understanding of the changes that were forced to take place in the company by COVID-19 pandemic and government measures to contain the virus, and to understand the feelings of newcomers caused by these changes, was chosen a qualitative research method that provides an opportunity to delve into the problems and identify the main trends and common features among all interviewees.

The data collection process included two main stages: an exploratory interview with one of the managers of the company's office in St. Petersburg and six in-depth semi-structured interviews with company employees who were hired during the COVID-19 pandemic or promoted during the same period. An analysis of the company's internal documents regulating or describing the process of introducing a new employee could serve as a significant addition to the study, but at the time of the interview, the company did not have time to develop a unified structure and a general set of new recommendations, therefore information about such changes was obtained either during the interview, or in the process of subsequent analysis and comparison of the results of the interviews with the regulations issued before the pandemic. The method of semi-structured interview was chosen in order to obtain more information and to allow an interviewee to express his or her opinion in a freer manner. Since interviews are conducted in Russian language, they were translated into English and analyzed in the following chapter.

The interview guide included 4 blocks of questions, which were covering different aspects of the data research:

1. General information on the interviewee;
2. Previous induction process personal experience;
3. Personal experience of induction process during the COVID-19 pandemic;
4. Feelings and thoughts about the induction process during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The interview guide was created in order to answer the research goals of the study and accomplish its goal. The general information block was included to get information on the newcomer's position and previous work experience. For example, if the respondent has experience in the same industry, it helps him or her to quickly understand the features of a new position, and as a result, the employee may be content with a less detailed guide.

Second block contained questions on previous induction process experience in order to see if the interviewee can draw any conclusions about the difference in approach before and after the

onset of the pandemic, respectively. If an interviewee has multiple inductions behind him, he can draw parallels or notice differences in approaches and then make useful conclusions based on that.

The third block is designed to extract from the interviewee details about the induction in order to appeal to his impressions and memories and, as a consequence, to reduce a chance of him or her missing some important information answering questions from the last block of the interview.

The last block of the interview is entirely devoted to the feelings and impressions of the employee. It is in this block that most of the information is collected which will later be processed into conclusions, and it is in this part where the answers to research questions are contained.

All the interviews lasted on average from 30 to 40 minutes. And since Russian is the native language of all the interviewees, it was decided to use the mother tongue in order to facilitate the conversation.

## **2.4. Respondent selection**

Respondents for the research were chosen among employees who joined the company's St. Petersburg office during the COVID-19 pandemic or were promoted or transferred to a new department during the same period. The main idea behind this choice was the need to collect first-hand information about the company's policy regarding the induction of newcomers after the introduction of measures to contain the spread of infection at the organizational and state levels, respectively.

Newcomers who were hired during the pandemic had to provide information from the point of view of an employee who was completely unfamiliar with the structure of the company and the specifics of working in it in order to analyze how new induction and orientation protocols work. While employees who were promoted or transferred to a new department were selected as interviewees to analyze the effectiveness of the induction protocols among people familiar with the general organizational structure of the company.

Complete anonymity is guaranteed to all of the participants of this research.

## **2.5. Data analysis**

All the collected data was analyzed, translated from Russian to English language and organized in the following chapter. Due to the open character of the questions presented in the

interview guide, the analysis is used to structure the information, interpret the answers of respondents and organize the data into the blocks.

The first two chapters of the study give the explanation of the researched phenomenon through literature review, formulate the research questions and serve as a reasoning for the analysis described in the following empirical part.

## Chapter 3

### 3.1. Results of Data Analysis and Discussion

As it was described in the previous chapter, the interviewees were chosen among PWC Saint-Petersburg's office employees based on the fact that they were either employed, promoted or transferred from one department to another inside the office during the COVID-19 pandemic. Such a choice had to guarantee that the interviewees went through the induction program during last 15 months in order to meet the research goal of this Master Thesis. The participants were asked to share some general information and later their thoughts and feelings on the specifics of the induction program during the pandemic. All the findings, conclusions and future recommendations are based on the answers received and supported by citations.

The first part of the interview was dedicated to general questions designed to relax the interviewee and clarify the details of his professional experience and the experience of induction programs, respectively. The questions in this part contained information on the job title and new job responsibilities, on the amount of time an interviewee works in the company and on the experience in the industry in which the company operates, as well as the question on the overall job satisfaction of a respondent.

All the interviewees were working in the company for more than a year and have never worked in the company's office in other location what allows to form a full and deep understanding of the induction process in the office in St. Petersburg and ensure that there is no biases caused by the imposition of impressions from different offices of the company.

Three respondents already had a significant professional experience and went through onboarding procedure and induction programs at least twice before entering the PWC's office in Saint-Petersburg. Two respondents already had experience in the industry before joining their current job and went through the induction process in competing companies, respectively, which allows us to speak about the weight of their opinions and judgments regarding the problem under study. For one of the interviewees current employment was the first real job, not counting all the internships and summer jobs he had.

Overall job satisfaction of all interviewees was at a fairly high level, and the shortcomings that they noted and that relate to the problem under study will be disclosed later in this chapter.

The information obtained during the interview and the conclusions based on it are structured in such a way as to consistently answer each of the research questions.



## **Q1: What have changed about the induction program of the company during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

The main difference between the induction process during the COVID-19 pandemic from previous practices was the need to include a new employee in the team and work processes using exclusively online tools. At the beginning of the pandemic, induction took place only once every two weeks, therefore, some newcomers were “unlucky”, and such an official meeting takes place at least a few days after the immediate start of work, losing relevance and complicating the first working days of a new employee. The only offline event was the day when a newcomer visited the company's office to pick up technical equipment, for example, headphones, a headset, etc., and on the same day they were given a short tour around the half-empty office, to which they could return only after some indefinite period of time. This was followed by a video call designed for the entire team of the department, to which the newcomer joined, where his colleagues were introduced to him in turn, and also asked to introduce himself and briefly talk about himself. A seemingly unremarkable first acquaintance, which was taking place even before the forced widespread introduction of telework, but here as well the effect of “online” was felt:

Respondent #1: *“During this call, I felt very uncomfortable. I am definitely an introvert, and it is difficult for me to immediately establish relationships with strangers, and even more so to join new for me, but already established groups, and then I was asked to tell something about myself to people whose reaction I cannot read, and some of which are due to some technical reasons could not even turn on the webcams”.*

Respondent #5: *“Unfortunately, during the induction process, I was only briefly introduced to my colleagues, so all my knowledge, skills and expertise remained just lines in their resume for them, which, given the high stress for everyone caused by the pandemic and its consequences, prevented them from simply taking and trusting me. As a result, I just had to write to colleagues asking how I can help them, what exactly needs to be done. Own initiative is a good thing, which then always pays off, but not when you do not fully understand how the team works and what the usual distribution of responsibilities is”.*

Respondent #1: *“Among the company's web resources, you can find, as it seems to me, a solution to absolutely any potential problem, but, unfortunately, they are scattered across different sites, databases, or simply across different presentations, and in the context of the urgency of the task, there is simply no time for this, and during the induction almost did not explain this, just giving links to such resources”.*

Respondent #2: *“Since I had no experience in the industry, for fear of missing something and the novelty of all the information, I listened carefully to every word of my colleagues, but most of the information was never absorbed, because there was not enough video or pictures. After all, as a newcomer, I can't even imagine in my head what it is about and how, for example, the interface of the discussed program looks like”.*

Respondent #3: *“At first, some of the information on the calls was not digested, and it felt kind of embarrassing to interrupt the flow of thought of one of the ten or even twenty participants, especially considering my newcomer status in the team, therefore, something useful could be missed. When you are sitting next tables to each other, it is much easier to come up and distract a colleague for a short while, asking him to show by his example what exactly needs to be done, where to click, etc.”.*

This problem arises from the novelty of telecommuting on this scale for both employees and the company. It should be noted that Respondent # 2 was hired in the first months after the lockdown was introduced in the Russian Federation, so it is difficult to blame the company for lack of preparedness - it just needs time to identify the existing gaps. The company does provide all the necessary instructions and guides, sometimes even full video courses. But the problem is that a beginner, who is in an obviously stressful situation, does not have enough time to find, read or watch the relevant material, revise the most important points and then return to the task at hand. In addition, a significant part of the problems facing a newcomer in the first days or weeks of work earlier in a similar situation were solved simply by asking a colleague to show the sequence of actions. In conditions when a beginner must show his best side, demonstrate efficiency and ability to solve the task set before him, he is embarrassed and scared to ask questions with answers that are obvious for everyone but him, by mail, during team calls or even in chats, since the telecommuting increases the conditional distance between them.

Many people underestimate the importance and volume of small daily tasks in the work of employees. So, risk management procedures require not so much intellectual effort as just time to complete them, and a lot of time. And the problem is that in the absence of experience in such tasks, they can take up a significant part of the employee's working time, and the induction process, among other things, must explain in detail the sequence of actions within such a task. And if earlier the manuals and instructions provided by the company were sufficient, today, in the conditions of widespread remote work, they are not enough, because one very important variable has disappeared from the equation - the opportunity to ask a more experienced colleague sitting next to you to show which button you need to click on which of the company's online resources to take

the required template, etc. And working from home only increases the "distance" between colleagues, which prevents a beginner from asking such "stupid and obvious to everyone else" questions.

Respondent #1: *"Due to the online nature of the induction process, most of the tasks in first days took much longer than they should have. And this is given that the tasks were quite standard for my position, and I already had experience in the industry. And the problem was not that the task itself was difficult or unusual, but because I was wildly worried and double-checked myself, even making obvious actions"*.

According to one of the interviewees, immediately after the introductory call with colleagues, he was already assigned a task that required working with the company's web resources. And the main difficulty was the lack of preparedness of the beginner. As a result, he had to spend much more time, since the use of such web resources turned out to be a non-trivial mission. Live communication with colleagues, including non-verbal communication, would help to understand their attitude to the newcomer's work and dispel these doubts, and, as a result, increase the newcomer's work efficiency, productivity and overall job satisfaction.

## **Q2: What newcomers feel about the company's induction program during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Respondent #2: *"For me, this appointment was the first real and adult job, it was also my first time inside a large, international company, and my expectations from meeting colleagues were very high. But since I am, on the whole, a closed person, I was careful to take the initiative, and this caution left me alone for the first few weeks. Thanks to my colleagues, who recently joined the company themselves and texted me themselves, because they still remembered how difficult and nervous it can be"*.

Respondent #4: *"I am extremely concerned about my career and its growth, so the increased distance between me and my immediate manager makes it difficult to demonstrate my full potential and development"*.

Respondent #5: *"Nobody sees what part of the work I did and how I did it, except for one or two senior colleagues to whom I send files, analytics or part of the presentation. It seems to me that no one sees how I work, and not what my colleagues have done or altered twice or three times. And here there are no complaints about the fact that they do not trust me with something really*

*important, here it is more likely that I am not starting to build my own reputation, it seems to be under even less control on my part than it would have been before the pandemic”.*

Being at the starting positions in the company or joining a new team, the result of the newcomer's work is checked and rechecked by several people along the chain. While the decision on the success of the overall task given to the entire team is made by senior managers or partners who see only the final result, a polished version of a presentation or document. Thus, managers do not see exactly what part of the work a particular newcomer is doing, cannot assess its quality and, therefore, cannot independently form their opinion about this employee. As a result, the question of promoting or simply rewarding a newcomer lies in the hands of his senior colleagues, who convey their opinion about him to the immediate heads of departments and partners. The same can be said for newcomers to the team, but not in the company, as often when promoted or transferred to another department, management also changes. And it seems that this situation is nothing new, since such a hierarchy has long been entrenched in large, especially global and international organizations, but telework and work from home pose two problems at once in this context: 1) senior colleagues see only the final result of work and form their own opinion based on it, while both science and practice have long agreed that in the initial positions the amount of effort, responsibility and ability to think play no less role than just the end result, because it is understood that the main task of finding an employee in the initial positions, it is mainly not to share amazing conclusions and innovative ideas, but, first of all, to learn and demonstrate interest in development - this is what remains almost invisible to prying eyes with the introduction of telework and the appearance of "distance" between colleagues. 2) a newcomer, working from home, has an extremely limited opportunity to correct the first impression he made of himself with senior colleagues and, as a result, with senior managers, department heads and company partners. Once again, the distance created by remote work interferes with the routine process of correcting mistakes and “doing your homework”, not depriving such an opportunity at all, but still complicating the process of restoring reputation and gaining respect.

Respondent #1: *“When the team collects the final file or the final presentation on the project, then everyone who is on the working group is put in a copy of the email. And several times, opening such a file, I panicked through to "my part" of the work and saw that about 70% had been changed. And in the 2 weeks that have passed since I sent my part to the manager, no one said a word to me. It is clear that at this moment my self-esteem fell down, and anxiety literally skyrocketed, because I could not say with confidence that the removed or changed parts of my work were good enough, and they simply did not find a place as unnecessary”.*

Another problem appeared during the induction period was the lack of feedback, which became a particularly acute for employees, whose who entered PWC during the pandemic. Lack of experience in performing similar tasks and of experience in the industry, in general, became incentives for a significant decrease in self-confidence, their abilities and the results of their work. Of course, there are exceptions, but this, according to one of the respondents, is “*more an initiative of specific people than a general rule, despite the company's policy*”. It is difficult for such employees to decide and write to colleagues, asking a direct question: “What do you think about my part in the project? What could I improve?”, And it is difficult to blame them for this, because they do not have sufficient expertise and skills that would help them to be more confident.

Respondent #3: “*The induction process was not easy, even considering that I just moved from one position to another and only partially changed the team in which I work. But the problem was not the technical component, but rather the complicated process of getting to know my new colleagues. I have always been a popular coffee machine small talker, and now coffee machine is at arm's length from my home workspace*”.

The inability to properly build relationships with colleagues sowed doubts in the respondents both in terms of their attitude towards them and in terms of the work performed. Such doubts, in turn, forced to overdo it and try to overdeliver, stimulated stress and increased work-related fatigue. And this process drove an overall job dissatisfaction and a drop in employee engagement and productivity:

Respondent #1: “*I always had the feeling that I was not finalizing, I was not doing enough, so in the absence of other options, I just constantly, as it seemed to me, improved files and presentations. As a result, having reviewed these files, now I understand that I was just wasting time in which I could have rest, and the result would have remained the same. I just drove myself crazy and then wondered why I did not have the energy and the desire to work I used to have*”.

Thus, the results of data analysis can be presented in the form of the following table:

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Data analysis results</b>
What have changed about the induction program of the company during the COVID-19 pandemic?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The induction process was almost fully switched to online;</li> <li>• Old instructions and manuals require an update to the current working</li> </ul>

	<p>conditions with the dominance of telework;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The unexpected widespread adoption of telecommuting leads to a number of organizational problems, such as organizational invisibility of employees in front of colleagues and superiors, respectively;</li> <li>• Online induction lacks opportunities for the organizational socialization of a newcomer;</li> <li>• Newcomer's lack of socialization and communication within the company leads to the isolation of the newcomer;</li> <li>• Lack of feedback and organizational socialization brings overdelivering intensions and an increase in work-related fatigue and job dissatisfaction as a consequence;</li> </ul>
What newcomers feel about the company's induction program during the COVID-19 pandemic?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newcomers feel isolated from the colleagues and invisible for managers;</li> <li>• Isolation and lack of communication increase stress levels and work-related fatigue;</li> <li>• Newcomers feel they have to compensate for the "invisibility" to managers and bosses through overworking and always trying to do more, which increases the feeling of fatigue and negatively affects productivity;</li> <li>• Newcomers feel that the induction program has to be updated and developed considering the specifics of</li> </ul>

	the current pandemic situation and future working conditions, such as telework;
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### 3.2. Conclusion & Recommendations

The induction programs are a topic widely studied in the world of science. But even in such a seemingly understandable topic, new branches are constantly appearing that deserve attention. Thus, the development of technologies and the subsequent spread of the concept of telecommuting led to the need to understand the features of such programs for teleworkers. But never before, before the COVID-19 pandemic, telework has received such a rapid and widespread spread, especially in conditions when it is becoming not a backup or additional, but the main format of work for a significant proportion of the workforce around the world. No one was ready: not companies, not employees, not academics, and that is why companies made the simplest at first glance mistakes or did not pay attention to what now seems obvious to us. But this is normal, because the process of adaptation to essential and fundamental, even if, as we want to believe, and temporary changes do not take place in a day or even a month. Of course, some companies were better prepared than others, but everyone should be ready to develop and learn, especially when you least expect it. It is this thought that has left the COVID-19 pandemic in the minds of most managers, and this is far from the last lesson it will teach us.

Unfortunately, this study could not give concrete answers to all the questions raised, but its goal, first of all, was to explore the topic in the context of current reality, to understand what weaknesses and strengths of a pretty much standard HR instrument, helped to reveal the overall teleworking transition.

This Master Thesis consists of three main parts with all of them having a specific role in reaching the research goal. The first part was designed to reveal the basic concepts that will be used in the future to conduct the research itself, such as telework. Another goal of the first chapter was to identify a research gap and to put an emphasis on the importance of such a gap in the current reality, in specific, in the situation of a global pandemic. Based on the research provided in the first chapter, two research questions were formulated.

The second chapter explained the research design and methodology as well as justified the case-study choice and the selection of respondents. Together with the third chapter, they described

the empirical part of the research and provided the results of data analysis. Empirical part includes the research findings as well as the answers to the research questions.

This Master Thesis is an exploratory study, and, therefore, its result is a description of the current situation and problems, the formation of conclusions and a groundwork for future research.

The situation is such that even if the global pandemic and its consequences in the form of restrictions and regulations at the state level are addressed as soon as possible, telecommuting, working from home and teleworking, in general, are likely to become an integral part of how companies do business. The benefits of telecommuting are undeniable, but, as discussed in previous chapters, they are only one side of the principles of this work format. The downside is the obvious disadvantages of remote work. And since both the advantages and disadvantages grow from one source - the main idea, the principles of telework, it is not possible to receive only one of these two components. Consequently, the only way to effectively use telework is to competently adapt all existing business processes to this format. And the induction program should be among the first in line for renewal and development, since it is these programs that lay the foundation for the subsequent effective and productive work of employees by acquainting a newcomer with colleagues, with the principles of the company, its organizational features and well-established business processes. The metaphor with dance is the best fit here, according to which the company and the new employee should feel like dance partners, by their actions simultaneously maintaining the established status quo in the company and allowing the organization to renew itself, to allow new ideas, new solutions, a new look at surrounding reality. It is in the synthesis of these two processes the secret of the newcomer's "transformation from an outsider to participating as an effective insider" lies (Feldman, 1976).

The result of this work can be considered not only the picture formed during the interview and the analysis of the data obtained, but also a list of recommendations, partially based on the opinions of the interviewees themselves.

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Data analysis results</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
What have changed about the induction program of the company during	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The induction process was almost fully switched to online;</li></ul>	1. Updating the entire induction program and creating two groups of manuals and instructions:



<p>the COVID-19 pandemic?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Old instructions and manuals require an update to the current working conditions with the dominance of telework;</li> <li>• The unexpected widespread adoption of telecommuting leads to a number of organizational problems, such as organizational invisibility of employees in front of colleagues and superiors, respectively;</li> <li>• Online induction lacks opportunities for the organizational socialization of a newcomer;</li> <li>• Newcomer's lack of socialization and communication within the company leads to the isolation of the newcomer;</li> <li>• Lack of feedback and organizational socialization brings overdelivering intensions and an increase in work-related fatigue and job dissatisfaction as a consequence.</li> </ul>	<p>for full time remote employees; for employees partially or temporarily involved in telework;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Invest in creating video tutorials on how to use the company's Internet resources, detailing the correct sequence of actions;</li> <li>3. Organization of both online and offline events by the company to provide broader opportunities for organizational socialization of future newcomers and current employees in order to avoid social isolation of employees, their invisibility to colleagues and bosses, etc.;</li> <li>4. Develop the Buddy program and increase the interest of senior colleagues in participating.</li> <li>5. Create a feedback routine that involves all the employees;</li> <li>6. Create of a VR tour around the company's office.</li> </ol>
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What newcomers feel about the company's induction program during the COVID-19 pandemic?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newcomers feel isolated from the colleagues and invisible for managers;</li> <li>• Isolation and lack of communication increase stress levels and work-related fatigue;</li> <li>• Newcomers feel they have to compensate for the "invisibility" to managers and bosses through overworking and always trying to do more, which increases the feeling of fatigue and negatively affects productivity;</li> <li>• Newcomers feel that the induction program has to be updated and developed considering the specifics of the current pandemic situation and future working conditions, such as telework.</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Expand the personalized approach to newcomers, increasing empathy and stimulating the building of interpersonal relationships in order to provide much-needed support in the future;</li> <li>2. Create broad profiles describing all office employees, their hobbies, interests and individual details of their personal life, which they will be ready to share;</li> <li>3. Create chatbots or use existing tools to organize informal coffee breaks during the working hours to close the distance between colleagues and decrease the level of stress during the day.</li> </ol>
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### 3.3. Managerial Implications

Managerial implications of the study can be characterized as providing companies with a deeper understanding of the current situation, the accompanying problems, and the opportunity to look at the issue through the eyes of employees. Such an opportunity to take the place of a newcomer in the company will allow you to truly realize all the obstacles encountered on his way, becoming the first step on the path to change, a variation of the first steps on the way to "user experience" based design. The results of this study can serve as a starting point for repeating this path within any company in any industry. In addition, the experience of the regional office of a

large international company like PricewaterhouseCoopers will be definitely useful for many managers and organizations' directors.

Speaking about PWC's St. Petersburg office itself, the literary review and analysis of the data obtained during the interviews presented in the work will allow the company of research to look from the outside at its internal processes and re-evaluate individual components and other companies to learn from that experience in order to adapt to the current pandemic circumstances.

Revealing the details of the newcomers' perception of the whole process will help to create strategies and instruments that help them in adaptation and stimulate their development, as well as increase in their productivity.

### **3.4. Theoretical Contribution**

This master thesis contributes to the literature on induction programs for remote employees and on induction programs, in general. Although there are many papers and studies focus on the specifics of the induction programs for remote employees, very few of them have been published after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and analyzed the peculiarities this global change brought to the way of doing business, and onboarding processes as its important part. And even fewer of them choose to research this problem in the Russian context.

Since this study aims to explore a relatively unknown field, it provides a basis and a starting point for future researches on how companies were adapting to the pandemic, what actions they took, and what qualitative and quantitative expression such actions had in order to identify the most optimal sequence of actions and determine the effectiveness of each of them.

Despite the fact that the science of human resource management has long come to the conclusion about the importance of geographic, social, political and cultural contexts for the effectiveness of various strategies, there is a lack of such research in terms of induction programs for remote employees. And although for this master's thesis an office located in the Russian Federation was chosen as the object of the case study, such contexts were not part of the current research, since a more general approach was required to begin with.

### **3.5. Limitations**

It is extremely important to keep in mind the limitations of this work, the main of which is the very nature of the case study, which allows you to analyze one or several companies at a time, which prevents further free extrapolation of the findings to the general sample. To get around this

limitation, it is necessary to narrow down the research object and analyze a large sample of companies with different approaches and possibly even from different industries.

Another limitation is that the company's actions were analyzed, for the most part, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, so a significant part of the actions carried out by the company cannot be singled out as the main strategy or vision of the organization - the company's employees did everything from them. depended on just keeping going, in other words, they were plugging the holes that kept popping up.

And finally, only one of the company's offices was subjected to analysis, which had some freedom in making decisions if the general guidelines of the head office continued to be observed. Consequently, to form general conclusions, a comparative analysis of a number of company offices is required.

## Appendix

### Appendix 1. Interview Guide

General Information	
1.1 Job title and responsibilities	Could you please name your job title and describe your responsibilities?
1.2 Number of years in the company	Could you please tell how long you are working in the company and in the Saint-Petersburg office of the company respectively?
1.3 Professional experience	Have you had any experience in the current job industry, including internships?
1.4 Overall job satisfaction	How do you like working in the company?

Personal experience of induction process during the COVID-19 pandemic
2.1 What did the induction process in the company involve?
2.2 What stages do you find the most and the least effective in terms of preparing you for a new job?
2.3 How you were introduced to your new colleagues?
2.4 What challenges you faced during the induction process?

Previous induction process personal experience
3.1 What were the main differences between your last induction process and the previous ones?
3.2 What was missing due to the online nature of the induction process?

3.3 What were the benefits of the online nature of the induction process?

3.4 How teleworking and online induction process affected your transition to the new position?

**Feelings and thoughts about the induction process during the COVID-19 pandemic**

4.1 What are your thoughts and feelings about the induction process in the company?

4.2 What would you add or develop in the induction process of the company in the pandemic times?

4.3 What “pandemic” lessons, in terms of the induction programs, can be learned by the company?

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